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THE BURNING
OF
MOSCOW.



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THE
BURNING OF MOSCOW,

A POEM,

BY THE LATE
R. C. CHATER, ESQ.

OF MAGDALEN HALL, OXFORD.

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CONDO ET COMPONO, QUÆ MOX DEPROMERE POSSIM.'

HORACE.

THE BURNING OF MOSCOW.

HARK ! on the trembling breeze why nearer come

Those distant echoes of the rolling drum ?

Why from exulting myriads burst on high

That rending shout, that fearful battle-cry ?

'Tis he ! — th' Invader ! — who from Gallia leads

Her warrior sons to fame and laurell'd deeds :

'Tis he ! the tyrant still unbow'd in pride,

Drives his fierce lightnings o'er the nations wide.

2

Lo ! where on yonder hill,¹ in dense array,
Warrior and horse urge on their awful way,
Far upon serried lines of crest and mail
Descend the flashes of that sunbeam pale ;
While thirsty lance and reeking sabre gleam
Red with the blood from Borodino's² stream.

See Europe, crouching to the Victor's sway,
Yields her brave sons to swell the proud array :

¹ 'The Hill of Salvation ; so named because from that eminence the Russian traveller obtains his first view of Moscow.'—*Life of Buonaparte in Family Library*.

² The French suffered severely in a battle at this river, though they finally forced their way across it.

Here the dark Austrian¹ smarts beneath his chain,
 The generous Poles² for freedom pant again :
 Not such the numbers of that barb'rous horde³
 Who ruthless once on fair Italia pour'd,
 Marr'd the green beauty of her vintage bowers,
 And laid in dust her trophied halls and towers.
 To Moscow's walls, now spread in glorious view,
 They proudly march, and promis'd fame pursue :

¹ The 30,000 Austrians under Schwartzenberg.

² 'The Poles readily joined — as the invasion was avowedly undertaken with a view of emancipating them.' — *Count Segur*.

³ See the *Conversations Lexikon* (Moskwa).

Borne have they come, like desolation's wave,
 O'er welt'ring ranks and patriot bosoms brave ;
 Before them now—an Empire prostrate lies ;
 'Tis but to grasp—and their's the mighty prize !
 Far on the space, whose surface wide doth lie
 Beneath the mantle of a northern sky,
 Lo ! beauteous there, the “ Mother City”¹ rears
 Her proud tiara of a thousand years !

¹ The ancient metropolis, affectionately called by the Russians, “ Mother Moscow.” *Family Library*.—Founded by Jurge 1147. *Conversations Lexikon*.

Queen of the desert ! with thine image fair
What fairy dream, what vision may compare,
When bursts afar upon the raptur'd sight
Thy golden Zone of palace mansions bright ?
When from that sacred hill, now gleaming o'er,
The stranger greets thee, and thy sons adore,
Oh ! who can tell, as there the pilgrim kneels,
How thrills his bosom with the joy he feels,
When bending low, he weeps once more to see
His father's home, his cradle,—all in thee ?

6

Fair was the scene, bright City ! that arose
So dear to thine, — so wondrous e'en to foes.
Here Gothic towers attract the gazer's eye ;
There swelling domes in blazing beauty vie :
And far above, begirt with many a tower,
The ancient seat of pomp and sceptred power,
In hoary pride, grey rob'd in mist of years
The Kremlin huge its frowning form uprears.
Dear are the ties, by death alone undone,
That bind to Moscow's walls her patriot son ;

Dear are to him her towers, and dear her fanes—
Dear as the life-blood streaming in his veins :
In fields of strife for thee he yields his breath,
Each peril dares, and proudly smiles on death.
Oh yes!—if Heaven a spark of fire impart
To warm the rugged virtues of the heart,
To rouse in man the patriotic call
That bids him nobly for his country fall ;
Within thy breast, unshrinking to the foe,
Rude gallant Russ ! that spark of Heav'n doth glow.

Thine is the arm each terror yet to brave,
If mortal arm thy City e'er could save.
'Twas thine at last to vanquish, in the strife
Most sacred deem'd, for liberty and life.
While Freedom¹ blush'd to own beneath her cause,
One single Traitor to his Country's laws.
Yes!—War has rear'd his crimson front on high,
And hostile banners flout the peaceful sky;

¹ See the story in the *Life of Napoleon—Family Library*, vol. 2, p. 167.

Reft of each hope, her pride and beauty shorn,
The Queen of Cities bends her now forlorn,
And they must go, her hapless sons, to roam
Thro' dreary deserts, to a stranger's home ;
Yield her they love,—to swell a tyrant's fame—
Her shrines to pillage and her hearths to shame.
All—all must go—and none may linger, save
The breasts devoted to a patriot's grave :
The few—oh ! deed of glory !—who remain
To fire the pile and rend their Country's chain.

See, thro' yon gate, the last sad remnants pour,
Rush onward—pause—and turn to gaze once more !
Gaze in wild grief, on all that yet might claim
A child's last tribute to a mother's name.—
Their ancient City !—Her, whose name had hung
From birth to age, endear'd on ev'ry tongue :
One look they cast, one burning tear they shed ;
Ah ! can it be—to urge a doom they dread !
They falter—linger—each perchance to grieve
On some fond scene, some object still to leave.

Thoughts, swift and sad, of long forgotten years,
Rush on the soul, and force the mourner's tears :
There was the spot—the home by grandsire rear'd ;
There rose the fane by holy men rever'd—
Where lay their father's ashes,—*there* too, they
In childhood oft had play'd the morn away :
For all, tho' doom'd, Hope wings each parting prayer ;
Hope still would gild each phantom of despair.
But hark !—what voice hath burst upon that dream,
Swift as the flash, the momentary gleam :

Away ! fond children ! 'tis your Country calls,
A prouder—dearer claim, than e'en your native halls !
Lo ! where in column deep and squadron bright,
Th' impatient foe descends the mountain height ;
Their eagle banners, glittering in the sun,
Exulting seem, ere Moscow yet be won ;
Onward they sweep, with conquest fair elate,
And pour in myriads thro' each lonely gate.
Lo ! enter'd now,—nor voice, nor sound they hear ;
No steps approach, nor living forms appear :

Around are nought but solitude and gloom,
The fearful silence of the living tomb ;
Save when the steeds' hard hoofs resounding beat
In startling echoes thro' each lonely street ;
Or when in hollow gust and mournful tone,
Presaging woe, the winds in howlings moan.
On, on they march ; already dread surmise
And dark forebodings in their bosoms rise.
Tremble, ye Conquerors at the coming hour,
Ye willing tools of lust and tyrant power !

Blood unaton'd and guilt unwash'd away,
For Vengeance call, nor longer brook delay !
The Sun was setting—rock and forest green
Drank in the lustre of his golden sheen :
O'er all awhile he flings his parting beams,
But ling'ring long on dome and crescent teems ;
Till sinking down on all he lov'd to view,
To Moscow bade a last and bright adieu !
Now gath'ring fast, the clouds of darkness roll
In sullen grandeur o'er the black'ning pole ;

Hang o'er the walls, and wrap in fearful gloom
The guilty spoilers, heedless of their doom :
Thro' the lone City far and wide they spread,
By fury fir'd, and lawless rapine led.
The scatter'd bands, in quest of plunder, roam ;
Nor spare the palace, nor the peasant's home :
Large is the booty, rich the spoil they find,
Where late reigned pomp and luxury combin'd.
Nor reck they, hurried on by footsteps vile,
The sacred temples ent'ring to defile :

Their costly shrines of sacred gifts are shorn,
And golden vestures from their altars torn ;
Nor stays the pillage, till with spoil oppress'd
The weary legions sink around to rest.
Silence again assumes her wonted power,
And deeper still the clouds of darkness lour ;
All—all is hush'd—save yonder lonely drum,
Or on the breeze a faint and dying hum.
Buried in sleep the weary squadrons lie
And dream, unconscious of the peril nigh.

Now is the hour of Vengeance! Doth the hand
Shrink at the deed, or tremble at the brand?
Hark! as resound upon the midnight air
The bursting cry of horror and despair;
See! as in wreaths the flaming spires ascend
And with the clouds in dusky volumes blend;
Smould'ring awhile, but fiercer now they rise;
In one red glow appear the arching skies.
Rolls on the breeze the drum's discordant sound,
And shrill-voiced trumpets, summon all around:

But neither cries resounding on the gale,
Nor drum nor trumpet now shall aught avail.
Those warrior bands, while striving to assuage
The angry flame, with bitter curses rage :
No mortal arm the deed may now undo,
Or, vainly brave, avert the judgment due.
Borne in swift blast, the flames devouring spread
From roof to roof—from pile to palace led ;
Till Moscow's walls are wrapt in Vengeance wild,
And dome and lofty tow'r in blazing ruin piled !

The day returns no dawning beam to bring—
Still Darkness broods and spreads his fearful wing ;
Save where the Sun, of wonted splendour shorn,
Disastrous twilight sheds—an awful morn !
Lo ! Heaven prepares to aid the strength of man,
And wills t' accomplish what his arm began :
The rising winds, as conscious of the foe,
From East to West in varying eddies blow ;
Bear to the Kremlin's form the raging flame,
Which yawning seems no meaner foe to claim.

Majestic pile ! within whose walls have shone
The pomp of Kings, and boast of ages gone ;
To Fancy still, how true each scene recalls
The ruined splendour¹ of thy storied halls !
Here sceptred Czars,—thy monarchs brave and wise,—
Recall'd to life, in ancient grandeur rise.
See holy patriarchs around thee stand ;
See nobles too—the bulwark of their land.

¹ Peter the Great transferred the seat of government from Moscow to St. Petersburg.

Tho' fled the pageant¹—still each frowning tower
Pleads for the past, the noontide of thine hour.
But now where once imperial princes trod,
And rul'd around the Empire with a nod ;
Where bearded patriarchs in ermin'd pride
Once stood, the glory of their monarch's side ;
Where nobles erst—a bright and goodly band
Arose—the guardians of their native land ;

¹ See preceding note.

There—in those halls, now bristling weapons gleam,

And hostile banners from the rampart stream.

There—now the Victor, in his tott'ring state,

For blood still panting, trembles o'er his fate :

See, by yon bursting light, and redd'ning glare,

That pallid brow—those features of despair ;

See, by that quiv'ring lip—dark o'er his soul

What demon thoughts, what whirlwind passions roll :

There—with'ring Hate, and dark dissembling Guile,

Reign uncontroll'd, or lurk beneath the smile :

There—wild Ambition, baffled of his aim,
Burns with a fiercer, and undying flame :
In that red blaze around, he saw expire
The phantom hopes that urged him to aspire —
That led him up Fame's unmeasur'd height,
To plunge him deeper in despairing night :
In darkness quench'd he saw the meteor beam,¹
Lur'd by whose ray, he dar'd each dark extreme ;

¹ Napoleon's Star.

Saw years of guilt, and dazzling glory won,
By Patriot hand and peasant's arm undone !
Morn pass'd away, and night returns again,
If day and night alternate now may reign.
Wider the flames extend, that serve to shew
But scenes more dismal—direr sights of woe :
The spoiler's hand again is grasping seen,
'Mid seas of flame, and tott'ring piles between :
Thence warriors heedless of a viler prey,
Bear glitt'ring wares and costly robes away.

And heaps of silk in contrast lie around
With black'ning brands that strew the reeking ground.
Yes ! large the treasur'd wealth, that ages past
Within these walls in silence have amass'd :
Here in rude splendour ever were allied
Barbaric pomp and Asiatic pride ;
Here fairer lands had pour'd their tribute due
Of varied arts, and skill'd Invention new ;
Hither from India's plains the camel bore
The balmy fragrance of her distant shore ;

Nor slept unfann'd the gentler Arts of Peace,
As dawning Science bade the darkness cease :
But ah ! the flame nor glitt'ring wealth may spare,
Nor Learning's treasures—both one ruin share.
No arm was stretch'd the letter'd lore¹ to save ;
The hand that fir'd—the treasure also gave.
In vain the Muse may mourn, the verse complain,
Exulting thoughts will mingle with the strain,

¹ It is well known that many libraries of incalculable value were destroyed.

And the best wreath she yet can weave shall be
In Freedom's name, proud Muscovite!—for thee.
A Gothic fane there was, that long had stood
By all rever'd, and honour'd by the good ;
A beauteous halo Time had shed around
The hoary tower, for many an age renown'd ;
Long was the conflict with the angry flame,
Till down it sunk to ruin and to shame ;
In the dark vaults, and 'neath the pavement spread,
In solemn rows were pil'd the buried dead ;

Hither the spoilers came, while torches bright
The gloom dispell'd, and cast a fearful light.
And here, by rapine led and impious lust,
They rake for gold—for gold, the coffin'd dust.
Hide, Darkness!—hide the deed beneath thy wing,
And o'er the scene thy blackest shadow fling:
Say where are now, late exil'd and away,
The peaceful throng, the wand'ers—where are they?
Where are those forms, that once in social glee,
Round the bright hearth, bade want and sorrow flee?

Where is the aged man, the sire, whose face
With meekness beam'd and venerable grace ?
Where are the husband and the tender wife,
And prattling babe — the sweetest tie of life ?
Far on the desert wilds exposed they roam,
By chilling frost and meagre want o'ercome ;
There as the storm relentless rages by,
See the sad victims droop, and faint and die ;
See there the sire, and once a destin'd bride,
The fair young maiden clinging to his side ;

Whilst he, the warrior, bending o'er that form,
From her pale bosom half averts the storm.
No falt'ring words, no stifled sigh express'd
The storm within—the anguish of his breast.
He thought of home—Pride dash'd the tear away,
He look'd on her—and saw the avenging day.
Dark, as the flash of his dilating eye,
He deems the hour of retribution nigh ;
He sees the clouds of winter gath'ring fast,
And hears the rushing of the Northern blast ;

When Heav'n herself on tempest clouds would sweep
From the bleak regions of the Polar deep :
He sees the arrowy sleet and whelming snow,
Deserts untravell'd, and the flying foe ;
And that array, man pressing in the rear,
By Famine gaunt o'erthrown, and winter wild and drear.
Lo ! who is he now hurrying bends his way
Thro' burning piles and scenes of wild dismay,
Arch'd flames above—below the reeking ground,
Thro' showers of flame, and ruin all around ?

'Tis he! — the Victor! — *now* with hasty feet
 Flies from his lair — the Kremlin's dark retreat;
 Within whose walls yet doubtful of his fate,
 He reign'd awhile in mock imperial state:
 Now as he fled, pursued by shame and fear,
 What dismal sights around him wild appear!
 Impending too a fearful doom was nigh,¹
 Had, Heaven permitting, bade the tyrant die.

¹ 'He narrowly escaped being blown up with gunpowder as he passed through the flames.' —
Count Segur.

Yet paused he once, as trembling on he pass'd
(Whilst o'er the scene his aching eyes were cast),
To weigh, perchance, the glory with the shame,
And feel the phantom that he grasp'd—a Name ;
To see in one short hour, a cherish'd scheme,
In dust and ashes vanish like a dream.
Tyrant of France ! now dart upon thy prey ;
Secure the triumph, and thy prize survey !
Five days and nights already now were past ;
The sixth too came, with darkness still o'creast :

Still sweeping o'er the fiery surges play
 In wild magnificence and awful sway!
 Yet oh! 'twere long and sad the tale to tell
 How each fair pile and goodly mansion fell;
 What scenes of woe were seen each day and night;
 What sights to scare, what dangers to affright:
 For never since that day, when Victors here,
 Salmatia's¹ bands usurp'd the conqu'ring spear;

¹ ' In 1611, Moscow was burnt down by the Poles.'—*Conversations Lexikon*.

Never since then, had flames so fierce and dire
Swept o'er the City, as this sea of fire :
Ruthless they rag'd till all in ruin blent,
Around they sunk, with their own fury spent.
'Tis done ! the morning clouds break o'er it—all
Now buried lies beneath one dusty pall.
All, save that pile, the Kremlin's giant form,
Hath bow'd in ruin to the fiery storm ;
All—that erewhile of fabric proud and high,
Had ris'n to daunt or win the stranger's eye :

The ruin'd tower—the battlement that told
Of deeds forgotten—glory won of old ;
The Gothic fane, the spire, the temple-dome,
The tow'ring palace, and the patriot's home ;
The fretted aisle, the long cathedral gloom,
The storied column, and the sculptur'd tomb ;
All that the wealth of ages—all that Time
Had swept and gather'd from each distant clime,
Rose in one fun'ral pile, one giant pyre,
In the last beams of whose immortal fire

The Sons of Freedom saw a tyrant's sway
O'er groaning nations, pass from earth away.
Nurse of the brave ! well hath thy Patriot Son
In Freedom's name, immortal honour won :
Bright is the Wreath—the laurel-crown that now
Decks his proud bier, or binds his manly brow ;
Around his Torch the beauteous chaplet grew,
Whilst from the flame a living strength it drew ;
The sacred leaf, now twin'd upon his blade,
Nor Winter frost—nor Summer heat shall fade :

From age to age, around his honour'd tomb
The flow'r shall grow, and there for ever bloom :
The ancient myrtle, equall'd now in fame,
No more in verse shall boast a matchless name.
Yes ! fallen City—long as e'er on earth
Fair Freedom's cause shall give to freemen birth,
Shall future ages laud the deathless deed,
Which to thy Son this laurel wreath decreed !

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